

# Mrs. Ingersoll's Atheism.

Many Are Trying to Convert the Widow of the Great Agnostic—Queer Letters from Christians—Her Grandmother Was as Atheistic as Her Husband—Tracts and Appeals.

(Copyright, 1899, by S. R. McClure Co.)  
When Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll died a peculiar question was asked by hundreds throughout the country, a question which clearly showed that they had no conception of the real state of affairs in the Ingersoll household.

It was: "Is Mrs. Ingersoll really an agnostic also?"  
Or: "Do his wife and family share his views?" "Will they not change now?"

Ever since the colonel's death letters have poured in from all parts of the earth, from well meaning people, who write to inquire concerning the religious faith of the family, and to urge

his pernicious doctrine before it is forever to late."  
"You are now punished for being the wife of an unbeliever. He must suffer eternal damnation for the doctrine he preached, and you will endure the same fate unless you accept the Bible and turn away from the carnalistic theory of Ingersollism."  
Thousands upon thousands of tracts have come in. A few simple copies taken at random are titled: "God's Word to the Bereaved Unbeliever," "The Fate of the Damned," "A Thousand Years in Hell," "Where Will You Spend Eternity?" "Finger Points to Heaven," "Unbeliever's Doubt," "Ingersollism a Fraud," "What is the Seal?" "What Say the Scriptures About Hell?" "Tomorrow in Hell," "Hope for the

view of Colonel Ingersoll's reception in the hereafter, was written by a well-known society woman of Atlanta, Ga., who lives on Peachtree street, and part of which reads as follows:

"My Dear Mrs. Ingersoll:—The cry of your grief-stricken heart has come to me, and I desire, oh so much, to contribute my grain of comfort. Dear one, can you believe that your beloved is still with you, at your side, a constant, though silent companion? Do take this comfort to your heart, you who knew the breadth of soul, the largeness of heart, the noble nature of your husband, so much more intimately than any one else could, can you not believe that these graces of heart and life were but the manifestation of the loving Father within him? Can you not believe, with me, that this same loving Father welcomed his son, running to meet him, falling upon his neck, kissing him and crying, 'This is my son, Robert, who has not recognized me these many years, but whom I have been loving all the time. This, my son, who was dead, but is alive again, has come back to his Father's house?' And there was joy in heaven! Take heart, dear, bereaved one. Take to yourself this assurance, this hope, this comfort, offered you from the fullness of a loving, sympathetic heart. He may not return to you, but you shall go to him!"

Some Queer Letters.

The percentage of illiteracy in the letters is something astonishing. One reads:

"Mrs. Maud Ingersoll: Dear Mad: I enclose you a tract, what is the Seal, and hope reading same may Convert you from the evil of your Ways, living you will write me your Opinion of it."

The avalanche which has poured in upon the family has taxed their utmost resources to sort out what wheat there was from the chaff, and to send replies to all who deserved it. So far as has been possible they have sent courteous replies to all really sympathetic and sensible letters, and have

Three large bureau drawers have now been set aside for the reception of future correspondence, and they are respectively labeled: "The Seal," "Ingersollism," and "Idiotic."

Up to the present writing Mr. Farrall and Mr. Brown are stocked with enough tracts and general religious literature to fit out half the Sunday schools and missions in our new colonies.

Most of the writers seem to doubt Mrs. Ingersoll's agnosticism. She could scarcely be anything other.

Mrs. Ingersoll's Ancestry.

History has a fashion of alluding to "the God-fearing pioneer mothers of the commonwealth." But there was at least one of that early band to whom such a description could not apply, and that one was Sarah Buckman Parker, the grandmother of Mrs. Ingersoll.

Mrs. Parker was the wife of a wealthy shipowner of Boston and after her husband's death she with her two sons, George and Benjamin, crossed the country, traveling in the primitive fashion of those days, and in 1836 settled in Central Illinois before the advent of railroads into the state.

Here her home was situated in the center of a triangle bounded on its three points by Springfield, Bloomington and Peoria, and located as it was on the highway of travel it soon became famous for the generous hospitality dispensed in true western style, albeit it was flavored with more intellectual sauce than usual.

Here the Parker family flourished and ere long exercised a decided influence on all educational, political and business interests of the growing community. George and Benjamin married and brought their wives thither in due time, and George Parker founded and brought to successful issue the town of Atlanta, incidentally accumulating a fortune thereby. But it was the mother, Mrs. Parker, who was ever the recognized head, the dispenser of the generous hospitality, the leader in discussions, the moulder of thought. She

was a woman of remarkable mental attainments, a deep and logical thinker and one who formed her opinions only after carefully studying, weighing and comparing. Had she been a man she would have made a splendid jurist.

As it was, in her well stocked library might be found more books than usually fell to the lot of any save a minister or a lawyer in those days, nor would any of them probably have possessed the selection she did. Her taste ran to a study of the religions and creeds of the world, and her constant companions were the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas and all that is known of Confucius, Zoroaster, Josephus, Swenborg, Hume, Humboldt, Volney, Voltaire, Gibbon, Kant, Schopenhauer, Zolne and others.

Became an Agnostic.

These she had read until she could quote many passages by heart and could handle their arguments with a wit and clarity all her own. She arrived at that stage where she believed only in the revelations of science. To her sons she taught her beliefs and they followed in her footsteps, for to them she was ever an oracle and the most wonderful of women, while the bond of affection between them was of that close and deep sealed nature which is characteristic of the Ingersoll and Parker families on both sides for many generations back.

The Parker home naturally became a central point of meeting for all the well known men of the time. Three of the best known and most welcome were Abraham Lincoln of Springfield, David A. Davis, afterward senator of Bloomington, and Leonard Swett of Chicago, and when this trio met under the friendly roof of Sarah Parker and they followed in her footsteps, for to them she was ever an oracle and the most wonderful of women, while the bond of affection between them was of that close and deep sealed nature which is characteristic of the Ingersoll and Parker families on both sides for many generations back.

The three men were all intimate friends and very fond of each other's society, but the fact that they lived at widely different places and that travel was not then as easy as now led them to frequently agree on some place of mutual advantage. "We'll meet at Mrs. Parker's," was always satisfactory to all, and so it was that the three men met at her table without being asked to say grace.

A Harmony of Lives.

Into this already intellectually brilliant circle Robert G. Ingersoll entered about 1838 and met Eva Parker, with whom he at once fell in love, and from the hour they met until the day of his death the harmony in every respect between them was as perfect as it is possible for two human beings to have here on this earth. Eva Parker, the daughter of Benjamin, was already an agnostic, and Ingersoll, then on the threshold of his career, easily dominated the little group by his wonderful mental powers.

This famous triette continued, unbroken up to the time of Mrs. Parker's death. She departed this life at an advanced age, ripe with the honors of a well spent existence and undisturbed in her atheistic belief. From her had radiated an influence which may be clearly traced at the present day. There are now living of her direct descendants, fourteen, all of whom are atheists or agnostics. There is not one believer in the Christian religion among them all.

Mr. George Reno, the great-grandson of Mrs. Parker, who tells this story of his ancestor, says: "One thing is certain, and that is the Ingersoll agnosticism, so far as my family is concerned, are far from being the fearful things usually pictured. Both my grandfather and his father, Mrs. Ingersoll's father, lived to be old men full of vigor and possessing all their



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facilities in a remarkable degree to an advanced age. They died the most peaceful and happy deaths, so easily that no one knew the exact moment when they passed away, and both of them remained firm in their agnosticism to the last moment. They were fairly adored by the people of Illinois in the neighborhood where they had lived and where they did so much to benefit the country, and they were mourned as but few men are in a community.

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They Were Used to It.  
(New York Tribune.)

H. A. Tarbox of Cleveland, who is of southern extraction, told the following story yesterday in illustration of the different points of view from which the masculine and feminine minds often look upon the same subject. "Some years ago a certain bishop of one of the states south of Mason and Dixon was called Mr. Tarbox. "Was visiting some friends of mine in Alabama, whom for convenience sake I will call the Smiths. The bishop, returning from a walk, found the family cat swimming around in and vainly trying to get out of the barrel from which the drinking water was drawn. After counting pussy the bishop entered the house and finding Mr. and Mrs. Smith in the sitting-room, mentioned the circumstance, whereat the head of the house became somewhat excited and went out, so he said, to have the water butt changed. Mrs. Smith, however, merely remarked: 'Dear little kitty, she often does that. I only hope the poor thing hasn't caught cold.' The bishop during the balance of his stay regarded the water served at table with an eye of grave suspicion."

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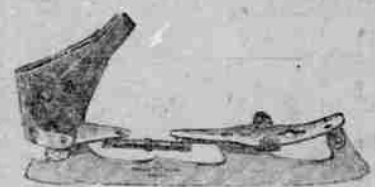
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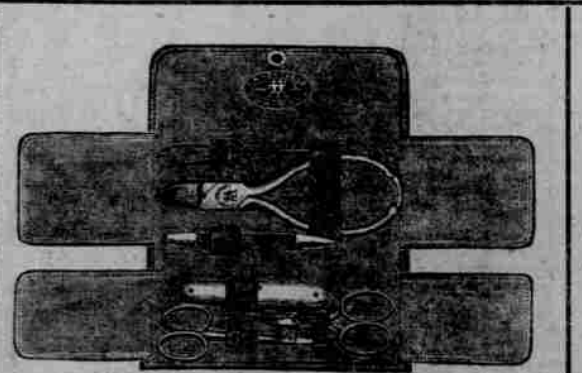
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